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Press Release

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PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. — Americans can rest assured that the military's highly skilled firefighters are ready to lend a helping hand to assist local, state and federal firefighters contain ravaging wildland fires should the need arise.

U.S. Northern Command officials treated local, regional and national media Aug. 5 to a briefing and hands-on presentation of firefighting aircraft, vehicles and equipment showcasing the command's roles and capabilities regarding wildland firefighting.

"The military has been called upon in the past (to assist with wildland firefighting), and is likely to be called on again," noted Mike Perini, U.S. Northern Command director of public affairs. "And when that call comes, you can be assured the military will be ready."

While homeland defense is the primary mission of the command established as a result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, officials noted that U.S. Northern Command also provides "one-stop shopping" for military assistance to civil authorities in the event of disaster relief operations to include wildland fires.

U.S. Northern Command consolidates under a single unified command existing missions previously executed by various Department of Defense organizations. This means the National Interagency Fire Center, or NIFC, in Boise, Idaho, the nation's support center for wildland firefighting, has one focal point when it comes to military support.

The Department of Defense is a "last resort," and thus is only called in after all local and state assets have been utilized, noted Army Col. Jay Marts, deputy chief of current operations at U.S. Northern Command.

If and when local communities and federal agencies need additional support — in the form of equipment, expertise, manpower, plans, organization, communications, and training — the men and women in uniform are prepared and ready to lend a helping hand.

Marts explained that if NIFC determines military firefighting assistance is needed, the center sends a request for assistance to the Department of Defense. Once authorized, the tasking is sent to Northern Command to execute.

"When called upon, Northern Command's mission is to expeditiously support NIFC in order to lessen or eliminate the effects of wildland fires," he said.

The hands-on presentation showcased personnel and equipment, which U.S. Northern Command could call upon to lend a helping hand. This included C-130 aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System from the 302nd Airlift Wing, Peterson; a Colorado Army National Guard UH-60 helicopter equipped with an aerial firefighting bucket; and Fort Carson Fire Department Wildland Fire Section personnel and



U.S. military members providing assistance with fires in the western United States.

Photo credit: Dept. of Defense

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equipment.

Although U.S. Northern Command has not been called on to assist with the fight this fire season, the command continually trains for the worst-case scenario ? an uncontrolled blaze which local and state authorities need assistance in containing.